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ABSTRACT

Practices for administrators to consider in order to achieve the nation's six educational goals are highlighted in this digest. Goals to be reached by the year 2000 have been established in six areas: (1) readiness to learn; (2) high school completion; (3) student achievement and citizenship; (4) science and mathematics; (5) adult literacy and lifelong learning; and (6) safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools. Practices that require the sustained effort of all sectors of society are listed for each educational goal. (20 references) (LMI)

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An Overview of the Six National Education Goals

by Beverly B. Swanson

To improve the quality of education in the United States, the nation's leaders have established six national goals, based on the premise that every child can learn, and that education is a lifelong process (Executive Office of the President, 1990). Achieving these goals will require the sustained effort of all sectors of society, including business and industry, social agencies, federal, state, and local governments, parents, educators, and the public. This Digest highlights practices for educators to consider in order to achieve the national education goals.

Goal 1 -- Readiness for School: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

The first goal is the most popular with educators. Respondents to the 22nd Annual Gallup Poll (Elam, 1990) cited the goal as one of their top priorities and accorded it the highest likelihood of attainment. To help achieve Goal 1, schools with preschool programs can...

- **provide developmentally appropriate programs**. All preschoolers, but particularly "at-risk" children, need a curriculum and learning environment appropriate to their experiences and capabilities (NAEYC, 1990).
- **use more comprehensive readiness assessment practices**. Readiness remains a poorly defined concept, yet it is used to determine school entry, retention, transition classes, and type of program [structured vs. unstructured]. A growing number of educators advocate the use of checklists and anecdotal records to assess readiness (Meisels, 1989).
- **coordinate preschool programs with social service agencies**. To achieve the health, education, and welfare of families, pre- to postnatal programs, family health and nutrition programs such as WIC, and jobs and training programs for parents should be coordinated with preschool programs (Kagan, 1990).

Goal 2 -- High School Completion: By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Achieving Goal 2 will entail the joint efforts of schools, communities, and students. Schools must nurture the social, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth of their students. To help achieve Goal 2, schools can...

- **examine exemplary dropout prevention programs**. Hamilton (1986) identified 17 well-documented programs that improve dropout rates, test scores, and absentee rates by providing a supportive alternative learning environment, providing resources such as counseling, tutoring, health care, and employment, and using the four C's--cash, care, computers, and coalitions (Mann, 1986).
- **reexamine curriculum and guidance programs**. When schools are seen as too rigid and demanding, students are likely to drop out. Schools that offer students challenging but flexible instructional options build on their abilities to achieve in different areas (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).
- **solicit parental support**. Parental support and input are key to keeping students in school. Some districts hire a parent educator to work with parents of at-risk children or offer support groups in which parents define the discussion topics (Hart, 1988).

Goal 3 -- Student Achievement and Citizenship: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.

Goal 3 encompasses academic achievement, thinking skills, and citizenship; its intent is to prepare students to be productive citizens. To help achieve Goal 3, schools can...

- **join the school restructuring movement**. Restructuring trends include a shift toward school-based management and decentralized decision-making (Harvey & Crandall, 1988).
- **use a challenging curriculum**. Goodlad (1984) suggests cooperative goal setting by students, in which some curriculum is planned by the students themselves. An environment that engages students also alleviates class disruptions, tardiness and absenteeism.

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- **use appropriate measures of achievement.** New measures of achievement must be developed to test the knowledge, achievement, and competencies of students beyond the level of memorization.

Goal 4 -- Science and Mathematics: By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Educators agree that achieving a competitive role in science and math will require a change in the ways that science and math are currently taught, better-trained math and science teachers, and reliable means of assessing students' math and science skills. To help achieve Goal 4, schools can...

- **identify and adopt exemplary science programs,** which begin in the early grades. Elementary schools can appoint a committee to examine science programs with hands-on discovery activities (Sivertsen, 1990). Exemplary programs also exhibit high levels of teacher knowledge, large blocks of time for science instruction, good science materials, and administrative support.
- **identify and remove barriers** to students' understanding of math and science concepts, e.g., math anxiety, gender and ethnic stereotypes (Wigfield & Meece, 1988).

Goal 5 -- Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning: By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 5 calls for the improvement of education practices on all fronts, beginning with increased literacy activities in the homes of preschoolers and extending to post-secondary levels. To help achieve Goal 5, schools can...

- **work with communities to establish family literacy programs** that offer services to families without literacy skills and resources to foster reading and writing activities in the home (Nickse, 1989).
- **collaborate with local businesses to determine the workforce skills** needed by students who live and work in that community. Critical skills such as listening and speaking may be fostered by the school curriculum (Natriello, 1989).

Goal 6 -- Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools: By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Schools, families, and communities must work together to counteract negative social influences and create safe and orderly schools. To help achieve Goal 6, schools can...

- **use preventive discipline** by structuring school and classroom environments for maximum learning and emphasizing community and self-responsibility among students (Grossnickle & Sesko, 1990; Moles, 1989).
- **define discipline policies and consequences clearly** and build in positive reinforcements for good behavior (Gottfredson, 1989).
- **begin a drug prevention program as early as preschool level** that incorporates self-esteem along with responsibility and good health habits (Steele, 1988). Programs should continue throughout the school years and address risk factors such as peer pressure (Hawley, 1990).
- **establish a firm antidrug policy** supported by appropriate action. Schools, communities, businesses, and social services should send a clear no-drug message to students and collaborate in prevention efforts (Hawley, 1990).

All Americans must participate in achieving the six national education goals if our nation is to maintain a vigorous economy and responsible democracy.

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